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ABSTRACT

The development of a comprehensive training model designed specifically for school-based decision making is discussed in this report, with a focus on teaching relevant skills and when to utilize them. Loosely based on Vroom and Yetton's 1973 model of participative decision making, the model is characterized by a general-to-specific continuum and an internal-to-external focus. It differs from the former model in its definition of the problem prior to the decision-making stage and omission of some of the attributes. The overall process divides the problem-solving task into smaller questions and offers guidance about when to elicit more general acceptance. Each training module includes information about the timeliness of utilizing different sets of skills and strategies, provides participation in prototypical case analysis, and develops a participant decision-making profile. One figure depicting the decision-making process is included. (LMI)

A Training Model for School Based Decision Making[1]

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Appropriate training is essential if school-based decision making is going to work. Most leadership/decision-making training has been designed for people in business or for school administrators. Both the issues facing school teams and the composition of the teams render those existing programs inapplicable to school-based decision making. We need a program specifically geared toward the unique problems and the unique teams associated with school-based decision making. Further, typical leadership/decision-making training too often consists of isolated skill development without much attention to when one should do what. Our goal is to develop an overall training scheme designed specifically for school based decision making that not only teaches the relevant skills, but focuses on when to use each skill depending on the content and context of the decision to be made.

The proposed program is very loosely based on Vroom and Yetton's 1973 model. Their model focuses on when and how leaders should use participative decision making. Attributes of the decision to be made determine the range of appropriate decision styles. The attributes are phrased as yes/no questions. Some examples include: "Is this an important problem for the organization?" (attribute A); "Does the leader have sufficient information to

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make a good decision?" (attribute B); "Is the problem structured?" (attribute C); and "Is acceptance of the decision necessary for successful implementation?" (attribute D). The Vroom-Yetton training consists of having participants respond to realistic cases, then having their decisions analyzed to indicate weaknesses in their decision making strategies. We began building our model with a set of issues/problems/decisions that were raised in 7 school based decision making committees. We asked four subject matter experts to score each problem for the presence or absence of each of the Vroom-Yetton attributes. From this process we determined which of the attributes applied to school decisions, whether some were redundant, and whether there were attributes important to school decisions that the Vroom-Yetton model neglects. The results of that analysis led to our proposed model.

The proposed model differs from the Vroom-Yetton mode in several important ways. First, our model includes a preliminary stage during which the problem/issue is specified and clarified, prior to the decision stage. Vroom's problems are designed so that the decision maker is already at a decision point. Most of the issues/problems from our data set were not ready for a decision. They required much further clarification and specificity before any kind of decision could be made. Thus, our model loops until the question is specific enough for further analyses. Second, our model omits some of the Vroom-Yetton attributes. Their model is based on having a single leader who has the authority to make and implement decisions. Without the single leader to make a value judgment, attribute A (the quality requirement) has less of an effect on decision making strategies because someone in the group is likely to feel each issue is important to the organization. In the Vroom-Yetton view, an important versus a trivial problem is handled differently depending on whether or not subordinate acceptance is necessary to implement the decision. In school committees it is more difficult to determine a problem's importance and every problem will seem important to someone; therefore, important and not so important problems should be handled in the same way in all situations. So we omitted attribute A from our model. We omitted several other attributes which were not critical for the problems in our database. Attribute C (structured/unstructured) was not meaningful because almost every issue that came up was unstructured or loosely structured. Attributes E (acceptance likely) and F (shared goals) were omitted because they overlapped with conflict (G) in our sample issues/questions. Third, attribute D (how important is acceptance for

effective implementation) seems to play a different role in committee-based decisions. It can probably be ignored on general issues if the wider group is well represented by the committee. When to include attribute D in the analyses will depend on how representative the group is and when a level of specificity is reached such that the group feels they can no longer speak for everyone. Fourth and most important, the output of the Vroom model determines only the level of participation the leader should exhibit. The Vroom-Yetton model is thus fairly narrow. We needed a broader model. The proposed model, therefore, has a more varied output.

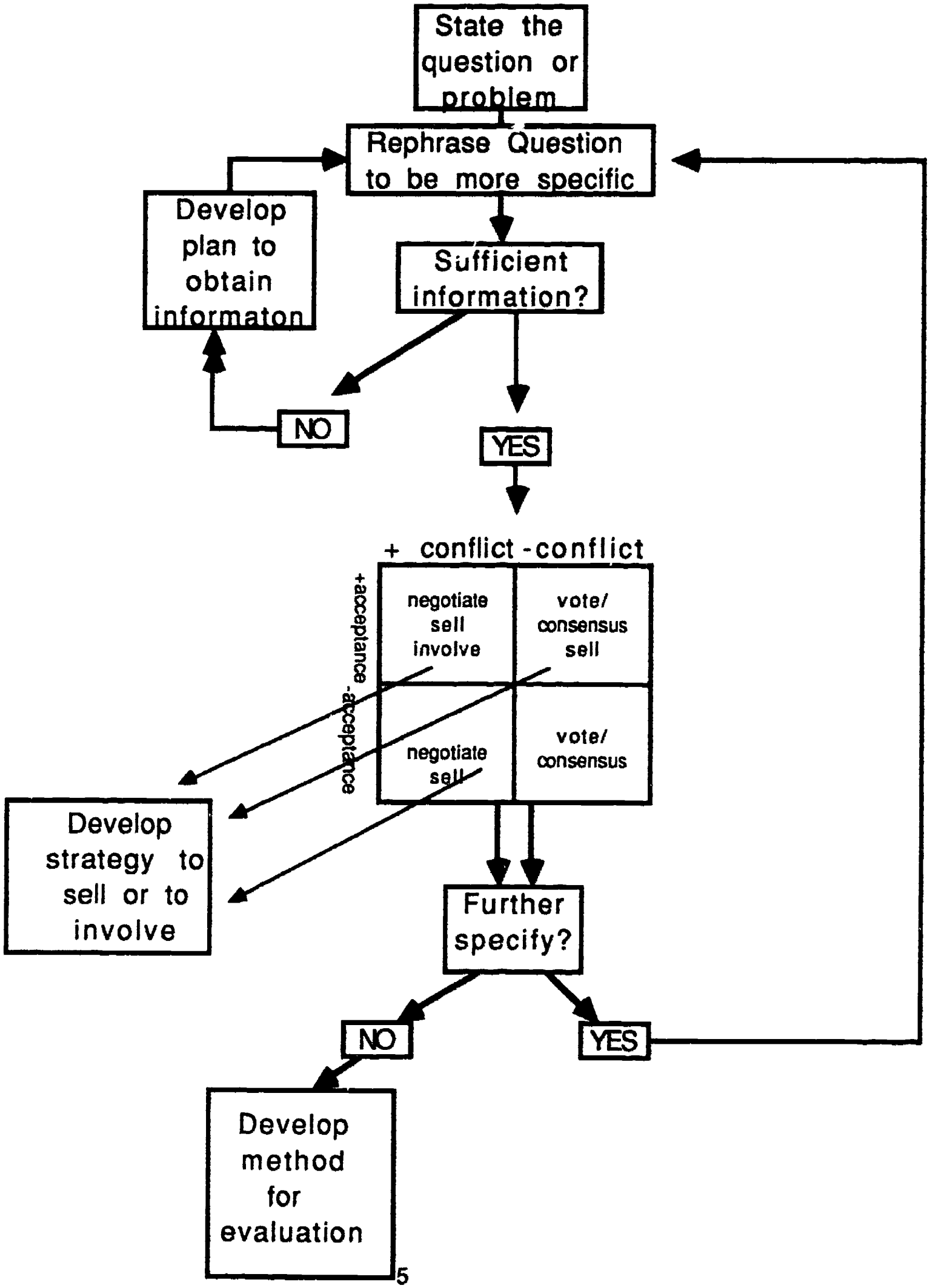
Generally, over time, questions/issues should move through the committee from general to more specific. On general issues and with a representative committee, the focus can remain on the people within the committee--a more internal focus. As the issues become more and more specific, however, it becomes increasingly important to add an external focus to the decision making, taking into account how others in the school and community are likely to feel. This idea is represented below:

We can think of moving from goals to objectives to strategies to implementations. A goal might be to "promote ethnicity." If the group agrees to the goal, then it would need to be specified further into one or more objectives. Examples might include "make children more aware of Black History" or "introduce more multicultural activities." Each of these objectives would then need to be accepted or rejected. Those that are accepted would then need to be specified further into strategies. These strategies might include activities such as inviting a speaker, changing the curriculum, requiring teachers to attend workshops, etc. Each of these activities would have to be accepted or rejected. For each accepted strategy, the committee would have to provide even more specificity. For example, what speaker? What topic? When? Who attends? Each very specific suggestion for implementation will need to be accepted or

rejected. The leader's role is to control the discussion in such a way as to move from general to very specific questions (and not go backwards!).

Note that at any point in this process, members who accepted the goal or objective may object to the implementation. Agreeing on goals or objectives does not ensure agreement on means to reaching them. Once the prior goal or objective has been agreed upon, discussion should focus on the implementation. If the group represents the school constituency well, whatever conflicts over general goals and objectives are likely to emerge among the entire school community should emerge within the group. Hence, whatever satisfies the committee with regard to general goals and objectives probably will satisfy the entire school community. But as more and more specific questions arise, it becomes more and more necessary to consider outside opinion. Discussions of general issues, therefore, will be more internally focused, while as discussions become more specific, an external focus becomes necessary. In the ethnicity example, when the committee begins to consider strategies that affect what individual teachers will do, it is essential to begin considering how those outside the committee will react. Or, if the general question is whether or not to have sex education and the committee is representative of the larger group, then their focus can be internal. But when the discussion turns to specific questions of exactly what will be taught to whom, the discussion must consider viewpoints of those external to the committee.

The first step in the analysis represented in the flowchart on the next page is to try to rephrase the issue into a Yes/No format. This process may require breaking it down into several components, identifying assumptions, brainstorming for processes, etc. A training module based on our data will address how a leader can facilitate this. Once rephrased in an answerable way, the first question is "Do we have sufficient information to answer the question?" If not, determine a strategy for obtaining the information, and exit the flowchart. Another training module will focus on how to obtain necessary information. Don't waste time on discussion. Go to another question/issue. If sufficient information is available, however, continue. If the issue is still at the fairly general level, the group simply determines whether this issue is likely to cause conflict. If so, negotiation will be necessary; if not, a simple vote or a consensus is all that is necessary. Another training module will focus on how to negotiate. If accepted, move to the next level of specificity. Repeat the questions: "Do we have sufficient information?" and "Is conflict likely?"


State the question or problem
Rephrase Question to be more specific
Develop plan to obtain informaton
Sufficient information?
NO
YES
+ conflict
- conflict
+acceptance
-acceptance
negotiate sell involve
vote/ consensus sell
negotiate sell
vote/ consensus
Develop strategy to sell or to involve
Further specify?
NO
YES
Develop method for evaluation
5

As the question/issue loops through and finally becomes more specific, the focus must expand to include external concerns. This is because as concerns/activities become more and more specific, the committee becomes less representative of all viewpoints. The committee may make an excellent decision, but unless accepted by the people who must implement it, a "good" decision is doomed to failure. The following question is added: "Is acceptance of this objective/strategy by people outside of the committee necessary for successful implementation?" The answers to the conflict/acceptance questions determine the approach. Refer to the two-by-two box. If the question is noncontroversial (-conflict) and acceptance is not necessary (-acceptance), then a simple vote or consensus is adequate. If it's noncontroversial (-conflict), but acceptance is necessary (+acceptance), a vote or consensus plus a strategy for selling the decision is necessary. If it's controversial (+conflict) , but acceptance is not necessary (-acceptance), negotiation for a decision and a strategy for selling that decision will be necessary. Finally if the issue is controversial (+conflict) and acceptance is necessary (+acceptance), then a solution must be negotiated, the decision must be sold, and a strategy to involve those outside the committee will be necessary. After the decision is reached, the committee must then decide on strategies to sell and/or involve those outside the committee. Another training module will focus on such strategies. Each decision reached must be specified further and, if possible, further analyzed in terms of conflict and acceptance; then further strategies for selling and/or involving developed.

Once very specific implementation strategies are determined and the ways to ensure their acceptance developed, the final step is to devise a way to evaluate the decision. Another training module will focus on this aspect of the model.

The overall process breaks the problem solving task down into smaller questions, shows the movement from general to specific, and gives some guidance regarding when to be concerned about more general acceptance. Each training module (how to break down general issues, how to get additional information, how to negotiate, what kinds of strategies can be used to sell decisions, how to involve those outside the committee) will include information on when to use that set of skills and strategies.

As in the Vroom-Yetton model, a diagnostic test will require participants to analyze prototypical cases (based on our sample of real-life cases) which

typify problems involving various combinations of the attributes. The prototypical cases will include more and less general issues, examples of the broader issues they came from and the more specific issue they will lead to, issues that need or don't need additional information, situations in which conflict is likely or unlikely, and situations in which acceptance is or isn't essential. Participants will receive a decision making profile indicating which of the attributes they focused on and which they overlooked. The training will be based on the same set of cases as the diagnostic test, teaching participants to use all the attributes in their analyses and when to use the skills and strategies learned in the various modules.

Vroom, V. & Yetton, P. (1973). Leadership and decision-making. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.